



Global warming roils Congress

By Dan Vergano, USA TODAY

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A heated war of words over a global warming research paper has boiled over in Congress. Two powerful Republicans are brawling over an investigation that one calls "misguided and illegitimate."



Rep. Joe Barton seeking information of scientists.

Alex Wong, Getty Images

The fight is the latest chapter in a long-running feud over a 1998 climate study. Long confined to Web sites and scientific journals, the dispute now centers on conflicting views of how Congress examines science.

On Friday, the chairman of the House Science Committee, Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., sent a strongly worded rebuke to the House Energy Committee. Directed to energy committee chief Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, Boehlert's letter condemned extensive requests made in June by Barton's committee for research data and financial information from three scientists.

Barton's committee also made similar requests to the National Science Foundation, which has financed the researchers, and a U.N. climate panel that cited their work.

Boehlert wrote that the "purpose seems to be to intimidate scientists rather than to learn from them, and to substitute Congressional political review for scientific peer review." Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., made similar complaints in a separate letter to Barton last week, as did the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In a statement, energy committee spokesman Larry Neal replied: "Chairman Barton always appreciates heated lectures from Reps. Boehlert and Waxman, two men who share a passion for global warming. We regret that our little request for data has given them a chill. Seeking scientific truth is, indeed, too important to be impeded by politics, and so we'll just continue to ask fair questions of honest people and see what they tell us. That's our job."

Neal called his committee's inquiries a "modest but necessary step."

This latest chapter in a long-running climate science sideshow comes even as the scientific consensus has firmed up that global warming is occurring. President Bush, for example, acknowledged at a summit this month the consensus that man-made greenhouse gases are

increasing global temperatures.

The main issue in the energy committee requests is a 1998 *Nature* paper by Michael Mann of Penn State, Malcolm Hughes of the University of Arizona and Raymond Bradley of the University of Massachusetts that reconstructed average global temperatures over recent centuries. The study concluded, as have about a dozen similar efforts, that the 20th century was warmer than the preceding ones, and temperatures have increased sharply in the 1990s.

After the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted the study in a 2001 report, it turned into a symbol for opponents of climate change science, such as Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla. Citing the criticism of two Canadian researchers, they see it as representing all the shortcomings of the scientific argument for global warming's reality. The same argument appears in the energy committee's requests to the three scientists.

Boehlert says the energy committee's intrusion into the debate "raises the specter of politicians opening investigations against any scientist who reaches a conclusion that makes the political elite uncomfortable."

Amid the debate, the three researchers replied to Barton's committee today, at times answering the questions and in others referring them elsewhere for information.